



Monday November 8, 2021

Testimony in Opposition to HB 15007

Good afternoon members of the Technical Corrections Committee. For the record my name is Dr. Aimee Copas and I serve as the Executive Director for the North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders (NDCEL) who serves all your school leaders administrators and directors such as Superintendents, Principals, Business Officials, Special Education Directors, CTE Directors, Technology Directors, Athletic Directors and County Superintendents. We stand before you today to ask you to please not consider an adjustment to the graduation requirements by adding computer science and cyber security during this special session of the legislature.

Our schools do not make this ask to insinuate in any way that we do not support education in this arena and in fact we do support an acceleration of embedding this work into our curriculum, however, to move to a graduation requirement is one that takes a more in-depth study and effort. This is a concept that has not been vetted with the field in any way that we've been able to discover. In fact, it is safe to say that nearly the entire field of educational leaders was not even aware of this until hearing about this bill showing up at the special session. In the short time that we've had to discuss this on my statewide weekly calls, calls with my boards, and discussions with key educational leaders, I have not yet visited with one administrator who is comfortable with this approach, or this bill at this time. As a nation we are grappling with mandates that the populous did not have a say in – these mandates have impacts. What we do know in North Dakota is that the best laid plans rarely come from mandates. Rather they come from what we do well here – collaboration – bringing together the best of educators to define a pathway in the best interest of our schools. In doing so we can figure out all the nuances that make initiatives a success – capacity, infrastructure, hard and soft resources necessary for successful execution. This process has not happened yet – and it needs to.

We 100% understand the critical importance of having our students increasing their knowledge in this area. The field would like to work on the most appropriate way to do so with our current budgets and hard and soft resources. We must ensure that an adjustment of this magnitude is in

NDCEL is the strongest unifying voice representing and supporting administrators and educational leaders in pursuit of quality education for all students in North Dakota.

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line with our state strategic vision for education and with our accountability plans we've set with ESSA. This is work that needs to be done and if it is of such a critical nature that it needs to be heard at a special session set for spending of federal fund and redistricting, where were the collaboration meetings with the key stakeholders? This has not been mentioned at any number of opportunities such as the Statewide ESSA meeting on Sept 9th, Superintendent Baesler's Cabinet meetings this fall with Superintendents or Principals, nor any of my statewide calls with the field that often NDDPI staff take part in. The logistical and staffing considerations are real. Building capacity for an adjustment of this magnitude is a real consideration. Prior to this shift, the field would respectfully request to be a part of the development of a workable plan that works for schools all way from Walhalla to Beach, Bismarck to Westhope, and Grenora to Fargo. This is out of nature as to how North Dakota successfully achieves initiatives. We are a state that collaborates, respects local decision making, pulls people together around initiatives that are important and builds the support to do so. We are asked in education that when it comes to big decisions that we have a majority of support. With things that cost our districts money such as building or remodeling our school buildings, we are asked to receive a 60% supermajority vote of our voters. Yet in this instance – even when the topic matter is of this nature - it was **not** discussed with the stakeholders who need to carry out such a requirement.

We respectfully ask that you not support the passage of this bill during this special session of 2021, and rather encourage a collaborative approach that can be supported by the field rather than a top-down unfunded mandate to our schools.